Tells the Facts and Names the Names

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Rumsfeld: Another Nut at DoD

They Call Him Star Child

The best thing that you can say about Donald Rumsfeld is that Henry Kissinger hates him. The antagonism dates back to the Ford presidency when Rumsfeld undermined Henry K's freelance diplomacy and quietly tried to destroy Kissinger's détente project.

Rumsfeld ("Rummy to his friends"—though he confessed to Nixon in 1971 that he never drank with reporters or Secret Service agents) isn't all that close to George Bush Sr. either. Remember Rumsfeld launched a presidential bid against Bush in 1988. Unable to raise much cash, Rumsfeld backed out and promptly endorsed Bush's arch-rival Bob Dole.

And back in the Ford days, when Rumsfeld was charged with picking a CIA director to replace William Colby, Rumsfeld developed a list of 10 names for the post, including Robert Bork, C. Douglas Dillon, Stanley Resor and Lee Iacocca. Bush, whose cause was being pushed by Republican powerbrokers, wasn't on it. In a memo to Ford, Rumsfeld argued that Bush was ill-equipped for the job and was probably using it as a means to rehab a career stained by his association with the Watergate scandals and start a run at the presidency. Rumsfeld's memo said Bush's "RNC role lends an undesirable political cast". Ford agreed and offered the post to lawyer Edwin Bennett Williams, who rejected it and only then did the plum go to to Bush, whose sole backer had been Ford's chief of staff, Dick Cheney.

For better or worse, the Rumsfeld pick proves that Cheney is in full control of the White House. Bush apparently had his heart set on Dan Coates, the somewhat laid back former senator from Indiana. But Cheney intervened, saying that Coates was no match for Colin Powell. Perhaps not. But Bush's initial instinct may have been right. Coates is something of a free-thinker and had a tendency to buck his own party, a valuable trait in a party run by the likes of Tom DeLay and Trent Lott.

Cheney's call for a system of checks and balances between the Petagon and Foggy Bottom might seem to suggest that Powell and Rumsfeld might not be in harmony on some issues. But this is unlikely. Like Cheney, Powell is a Rumsfeld protégé, first working with the latter in the mid-70s when he came to Washington as a Lieutentant Col on the move. Then during the Carter administration Powell really made his mark in the Pentagon under Frank Carlucci, another Rumsfeld associate.

Rumsfeld has a reputation as a moderate. This dates back to the 1960s, when he was a young congressman from Illinois, in the mold of more liberal northern Republicans such as Richard Schweicker and Nelson Rockefeller, and seemed to constantly at odds with the party leadership. He was denied a spot in the party leadership in 1968 and fled into the Nixon administration—a refuge for liberal Republicans. Rumsfeld headed up the Office of Economic Opportunity, where they concocted such communistic Nixonian measures as price controls and cost of living adjustments. Rumsfeld used his office as a training ground for a new generation of Republican (and Democratic) politicians. He hired Dick Cheney, Bill Bradley, and Christy Todd Whitman.

Rumsfeld was one of Nixon's favorite cabinet members and the two spent many evenings in the Oval Office drinking Scotch and plotting the future of Rumsfeld's political career. Some of these conversations were captured by Nixon's tape recorders. He and Nixon kicked around a number of positions

(**Rumsfeld** continued on page 4)

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Our Little Secrets

Vote Fraud 2000: Outside Florida

Black voters cast their ballots for Al Gore in record numbers last November 7. Their votes were also rejected in astounding numbers. A variety of new post-election surveys suggest that hundreds of thousands of black and Hispanic voters across the country were systematically disenfranchised at the polls. In Cook County, Illinois, alone, more than 120,000 votes cast in black precincts were discarded. In Fulton County, Georgia, which encompasses most of the Atlanta area, nearly one in every 16 votes cast in black precincts were rejected by voting machines.

The situation in nearby white middle class precincts was strikingly different. There the error rate varied from one percent to less than a half a percent. Much of the problem seemed to stem from the kind of voting machines used. Richer, whiter areas tended to have hi-tech optical scanner systems which allegedly have an error rate of less than one percent while urban precincts tended to use older punch card systems with an average error rate of three percent, regardless of the dominant race in the precincts. In black precincts using punch card machines the discard rate is more than seven percent.

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Some of this has to do with money. The voting machines in Fulton County, for example, were purchased in 1964. Precinct officials say they simply can't afford to upgrade. Of course, the more affluent (and whiter) suburban counties of DeKalb and Cobb have gone to optical scanners with a minimal error rate. But even that scenario is political, since allocations for election equipment are often made by the state legislatures.

In Cook County, election official purchased an error correction device that would immediately spit out ballots with problems, allowing the voters to recast their votes. But the Republican-controlled senate in Illinois passed a measure prohibiting Cook County from using the error correction devices, arguing that might create "an equal protection" problem for precincts which didn't have them installed. However, the senate, which oversees voting rules in the state, allowed similar devices to be used in predominately white precincts elsewhere.

Despite the shocked post-Florida tones of the press, this is not a new phenomenon. In 1978, a political science professor at Ohio State University surveyed ballot discards in white and black precincts across Ohio. He found that two percent of ballots were disqualified in white suburbs, while more than 20 percent where disqualified in black precincts. His results were ignored by policymakers, both Republican and Democrat.

A 1990 report by the clerk of elections for Cook County spelled out what it called "effective disenfranchisement of tens of thousands of black voters". The 48-page report concluded that in the 1988 presidential election more than ten percent of black votes were disqualified, while only one percent of white votes were thrown out. The report also calculated that the disqualified votes in black precincts cost Democrat Adlai Stevenson III his election in the very close gubernatorial race of 1982. A similar report was conducted by election officials in Atlanta after the 1992 election. They found that 108 of the 125 precincts with more than five percent of the ballots disqualified were in black precincts. Even so, the pleas of the election clerk for new machines were ignored.

At the national level, the Democratic Party has been curiously silent about the fate of its black voters, who were so sedulously courted during the election. The DLC continues to push the Democrats to the right, blaming Gore's defeat on his supposedly populist rhetoric. At least eleven Democratic senators have pledged their support to Bush's choice for attorney general, John Ashcroft. Under the rules of the senate, the tabulation of the electoral college votes could have been challenged by a single senator, thus throwing the election to the House and Senate. The Congressional Black Caucus searched in vain for a single Democratic senator to lodge a protest, if only to raise legitimate questions about the validity of the election and the supreme court's contorted ruling. Not one Democrat was up to the challenge. (There are no blacks in the senate and no blacks ran for any senate seat this year.)

When black Democrats expressed their anger over the party's lack of interest, Gore stepped forward to try to soothe them. His advice: give the Bush administration a chance and work with them over the next six months.

Bill on Al

Attending the annual Texas Monthly bash, George W was asked what he and Bill Clinton had talked about in their White House photo op. George W described how he had asked Clinton why Al Gore was taking his defeat with such poor grace. "It's been eight years", Clinton genially replied, "and we still haven't figured out Al." Then he added hastily: "But he's been a great vice president."

Westward Look, The Land is Dark!

The Age of Clinton signaled its passing in California with rolling blackouts, or at least the threat of them. It's entirely appropriate. At the substantive level Clintonism was the economic program of the Democratic Leadership Council, preaching the glories of deregulation and an unfettered marketplace. Corporations would flourish and the public bask in the beneficial consequences of corporate aggrandisement. Corporate shils like the Natural Resources Defense Council lent their weight to the push for deregulation.

Westward look, the land is dark! Californians are braced for utility bills two and three times what they were a year ago and two once mighty giants, Pacific Gas & Electric, and Southern California Edison, teeter on the lip of bankruptcy. The price hikes for electricity and natural gas presently being touted will undoubtedly spawn a new popu-

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As the sun sets on Clinton time, the verdict comes in on Democrats' dereg posture: an airline cartel and tripled utility bills.

list movement, calls for public ownership of utilities and energies supplies. It's hard to preach the virtues of an unregulated marketplace to small businesses bankrupted by their fuel bills and householders who can't afford heat or air-conditioning.

More parables of deregulation: Amid the threat of blackouts a CounterPunch coeditor left Humboldt county, northern California flew from Eureka to San Francisco and climbed on a TWA flight to New York. The Boeing 757 was about half full. After a couple of hours in the air the captain genially announced turbulence over Denver, adding that TWA had just been sold to American Airlines, but passengers shouldn't be concerned "because those of you with TWA advantage miles will make out like gangbusters".

The captain must have felt he was in line for a financial killing, because he was in jaunty mode for the rest of the flight, alerting "passengers on the left hand side to a spectacular moon", meanwhile consoling the starboard-side travellers with the news that "in a few minutes you will have an unusual view of Manhattan", which turned out to be the same old flight across Central Park. The flight attendant gazed gloomily down at her beverage inventory, clearly seeing little in her future to cheer about.

Airline dereg, remember, was sold to us in 1978, back in the Carter era, as the promise of scores of new airlines battling to offer superior service and keen prices. Here we are in the dawn of 2001 and it looks as though we'll be down to a couple of airlines by the end of the year. For people taller than about 5'6" a flight anywhere is a guarantee of physical constriction bordering on torture. Short and tall alike pick up colds or flu in the foul air and are spared food poisoning only because most airlines have given up serving food altogether in favor of pretzels. If the traveling distance is less than a thousand miles many now prefer to drive, particularly given the news of the soaring likelihood of runway collisions. There are some bargains to be sure, but in general prices are grotesquely high.

In the case of San Francisco at least, there's one paradoxical consequence of its semi-paralysis. Enlightened planners have made the airport into an increasingly pleasant place to spend the day. With a couple of hours to waste between two flights the CounterPunch coeditor was able to take in no less than four exhibitions, three of them of the finest quality.Throughout the airport there were on that particular day no less than 22 exhibitions available for inspection.

On this occasion the United terminal had a very fine show of drums and other percussive instruments. South Terminal itself featured an interesting display of police hats, collected by patrolman Calvin Chow of the SFPD during his trips to Europe. (Chow's webpage thanks Alexander Gultyaev of the Vladivostok PD for crucial help in designing the site.) The picks of the bunch were an astrakhan hat worn by Soviet police officers in the 1970s in the Caucasus, the cockaded ceremonial hat of the assistant commissioner of the London metropolitan police, the dashing plume of some Italian law enforcer of high rank in the early part of the century. There were many samples of service hats of Asian police officers, all of them banal.

AMY'S ANGER

Having been deposited safely at JFK by the jaunty TWA captain the coeditor made his way a day later to one of CounterPunch's favorite restaurants in Manhattan, Cendrillon, on the west side of Mercer St, in SoHo a couple of blocks north of Canal, where Romy Dorotan presides over an Asian fusion menu with Filipino roots. Romy once studied political science at the University of York in the UK, then at Temple, but sensibly laid aside the texts of Locke, Mill and the others in favor of cooking, acme of the fine arts. It was Joseph Conrad, introducing a cookbook by his wife Jessie, who wrote that of all the books, only those on cookery are morally above suspicion. Their one aim, the author of The Heart of Darkness wrote, is "to increase the happiness of mankind, to add to the cheerfulness of nations".

Romy's redoubtable wife, Amy Besa, greeted the coeditor warmly. "Alexander! Only this morning I was cursing your name." Then she hissed out the single word "Ashcroft", thereby indicating that she held CounterPunch personally responsible for the defeat of Al Gore and the success of the Bush putsch.

We teased Amy by suggesting that she was only opposed to Ashcroft because he annointed himself with Crisco and that if he'd performed the same religious rite with a first pressing of choice olive oil she would be cheering his nomination as attorney general. Amy denied this indignantly and continued to shower abuse. But will Ashcroft be effectively worse than Attorney General Janet Reno? This time eight years ago she was four months away from incinerating the Branch Davidians at Waco, and on the edge of a tenure that saw her fervent support for the "war on drugs", aka a war on the poor, most especially the blacks; her contributions to the crime bills of 1994 and 1996; the targeting of minority youth; her complaisance towards onslaughts on the Bill of Rights? It's a tough act to follow.

No doubt about it, Gale Norton, nominated as Interior Secretaary, is scarcely nature's friend. Her dreams are of Exxon's Grand Canyon and Disney's Yosemite. But once again, we should retain our perspective. Consider, for example, Bill Clinton's exit order, banning roads and logging across more than millions of acres of public land.

In all, the order, riddled with escape clauses, envisages a 2.5 per cent reduction of total timber sales in the national forests, which isn't much and if she's smart, Norton will reverse the order simply by opting for one of the other options offered in the environmental impact statement which formed the basis of Clinton's order.

What else can Norton do that Babbitt hasn't already set in motion? Not much. Last year Babbitt put a moratorium on the listing of endangered species, and he's smiled on the privatization of public assets through land trades, whereby timber corporations get old growth and we get the cut-over terrain. Salmon protection? The Clinton administration let the Republicans off the hook on that one, insisting that the dams on the Snake River won't be breached. Oil leasing off the continental shelf?

For Bush-Cheney it would be political suicide. Reagan tried, and had to back off. Norton will go after the National Environmental Protection Act, but here again Babbitt and Gore paved the way, with their Habitat Conservation Plans that have ushered so many corporate foxes into the coop. CP

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Now the Cold War Is Over

Russia Nukes Itself

Remember Minatom? Here in CounterPunch, 18 months ago, we broke the news of a plan to make Russia a dump site for the world's nuclear waste. Well, now it's official. Russia has now offered itself up as the world's nuclear dumping ground. On December 20, the Russian parliament voted 320-30 to overturn an environmental law that prohibited the import of commercial nuclear waste. The move, which clears the way for the US to begin shipping spent fuel to Russia, has received almost zero coverage in the American press.

The vote capped a two-year lobbying blitz by Minatom, the Russian nuclear agency, and an international assortment of nuclear profiteers, ranging from former CIA agents and tycoons to European and Japanese utilities and even a few renegade environmental groups, including the Natural Resources Defense Council. Minatom is now empowered to accept more than 20,000 tons of radioactive waste from 14 countries over the next 10 years. The waste is slated for storage at sites across Russia, where it will more than double the nation's own swelling inventory of nuclear waste and spent fuel, now estimated to total more than 14,000 tons.

Russian officials have boasted that dumping fees will bring $20 billion into the Russian treasury—much of it going to the notoriously corrupt Minatom itself.

Much of the money may go to build a new generation of nuclear power plants. According to a leaked May 2000 document, titled "Strategy for nuclear development in 2000-2050", Minatom has proposed the construction of some three dozen new breeder commercial atomic reactors in Russia, which it says will create a stockpile of high-grade plutonium for a new phase of nuclear weapons which Russian enviros call "dirty nukes". Any scheme to reprocess the spent fuel into weapons-grade plutonium would violate the International Atomic Energy convention.

Yuri Adamov, the head of Minatom, claims that some of the money will be set aside for environmental cleanup of Russia' estimated half-million toxic dumps. But Russian greens and some environmental bureaucrats have charged that much of the money will simply end up in the pockets of the Minatom "Mafia." "You can't trust a word Adamov says," said Yuri Vishnevsky, head of the Russian State Nuclear Regulatory Agency, a rival of Minatom. "Most of the money from this scheme will either be eaten up by Minatom or stolen."

The Duma's decision flouted the most energized environmental campaign in Russian history. Russian environmental groups had gathered 2.5 million signatures to put the nuclear waste dump issue as a national reformation to be voted on by the Russian people, a half million more than required by Russian law. There's little doubt the initiative would have passed overwhelmingly. Polls showed that upwards of 90 percent of Russians opposed the radioactive imports. This convinced the Yabloko faction of the Duma to vote unanimously against the measure, even in the face of offerings of money from Minatom lobbyists.

"This appears to be the largest discharge of nuclear contaminants into the environment anywhere on earth."

But at the last moment the Kremlin threw out more than 600,000 signatures on technicalities. Russian greens say they were sabotaged.

Russian president Vladimir Putin has made no effort to conceal his disdain for the growing environmental movement in Russian, saying last year that he believed Russian greens were a tool of "foreign secret services".

As the risks of a radioactive catastrophe in Russia, the Putin government is rapidly moving to sheer away the nation's few environmental safeguards. Putin has abolished the State Environmental Commission, the equivalent of the EPA and also emasculated the oversight powers of the Russian Nuclear Regulatory Agency (GAN). He has consolidated all authority on nuclear power with Minatom. GAN had angered Putin and Minatom when it withdrew the licenses of several nuclear plants after repeated accidents.

With the implosion of the Russian military, Minatom has positioned itself as perhaps the most powerful agency in the Russian government, with ties to western capitalists, and the Russian police and spy agencies. Now Minatom is even running its own bureaucrats for public office. V.V. Malkov, Minatom's director of a nuclear reactor in Ozersk, was recently elected mayor of that city in the southern Urals. During his campaign, he pledged to "repulse the so-called Greens".

Minatom has taken a cue from the public relations strategies of European and American corporations and begun to set up phony green groups. In November, Minatom funded the creation of Environmental Forum, a green front group that lobbyied for the import of nuclear waste and the creation of a new generation of nuclear power plants.

All of this comes on the heels of allegations that Minatom has been dumping nuclear waste at a weapons plant in Siberia directly into the Tom River, just north of the Siberian city of Tomsk, home to 500,000 people. (No, this should not be confused with the pollution of the Toms river. That exploit, by Ciba-Geigy, took place in New Jersey.) The Seversk complex contains the largest concentration of nuclear reactors and uranium process plants in the world. It was also the site of some of the worst nuclear waste spills in history. But the findings of a joint Russian/American team of scientists suggest that the high levels of radioactivity in the Tom River are not the product of historical spills but of current dumping of radioactive waste, including Strontium-90 and phosphorus-32, by Minatom.

The amount of radioactivity in the Tom River has been estimated to be the equivalent of the annual radioactive discharge from 10,000 nuclear reactors. "This appears to be the largest discharge of nuclear contaminants into the environment anywhere on earth," says Norm Buske, an American scientist who was part of the team investigating the Seversk plant.

"The worst part is that the contamination continues today and yet the government and the nuclear industry hides the real information from the public," says Elena Pashenko, a spokesperson for Siberian Scientists for Global Responsibity, based in Novosibirsk. "Under these circumstances, it is imperative for international environmental organizations to join forces."

Pashenko is right, of course. And that's precisely what makes NRDC's role in helping to lift the Russian ban on import of nuclear waste all the more despicable. CP

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(**Rumsefld** *continued from page 1)*

in the executive office that might catapult his career: head of HUD, secretary of transportation, head of the newly created EPA. Rumsfeld noted all those were fine, but that he needed to pad his resume with foreign policy credentials. Nixon warned him against working under Kissinger and Rumsfeld noted he had no desire for that. He suggested the post of ambassador to NATO, although he didn't want to look like "he was being dumped".

Nixon said he didn't think "it would look that way now". But the president questioned whether it would be the best spot for his political career. "I don't know what the hell it would do for you in Illinois. Maybe it's not the thing in Illinois."

Rumsfeld said he was willling to take the chance because "it would certainly fill a gap in my background". The two go on to berate the Democrats for being warmongers. "When we get down to it, the war will be over one way or another, next year at this time," Nixon says. "They [the Democrats] got us in, we got us out."

"Exactly, that's right," Rumsfeld says. "Republicans got us out of Democrat wars four times in this century."

"Four times in this century," Nixon says. "They got us into World War I, they got us into World War II . . . They got us into Korea, Eisenhower got us out. They got us into Vietnam, Nixon got us out."

"The Democratic mentality," an oily Rumsfeld suggests, "is to smother, to intervene, to try to manage things . . . The Nixon doctrine, and its domestic program, have a different philosophical base. It's to create, develop capabilities on other things."

In 1971, Rumsfeld, then counselor to the president, chatted it up again with Nixon in the Oval Office. Nixon was in a snit about Spiro Agnew's disastrous trip to Africa, where the vice-president got drunk with the press corps and pronounced his opinion that black Africans were smarter than black Americans.

"It doesn't help," Nixon fumed. "It hurts with the blacks. And it doesn't help with the rednecks because the rednecks don't think any Negroes are any good."

"Yes," agreed Rumsfeld.

As for the notion that "black Americans aren't as good as black Africans", Nixon said, "most of them are basically just out of the trees. . . . Now, my point is, if we say that, they [opponents] say, 'Well, by God.' Well, ah, even the southerners say, 'Well, our niggers is [unintelligible].' Hell, that's the

"They got us into Korea, Eisenhower got us out," Nixon said. "They got us into Vietnam, Nixon got us out."

way they talk!" said Nixon, putting on a southern accent.

"That's right," Rumsfeld said.

"I can hear 'em," Nixon said.

"I know," Rumsfeld replied.

"It's like when our black athletes, I mean in the Olympics, are running against the other black athletes, the southerner may not like the black but he's for that black athlete," Nixon said.

"That's right," Rumsfeld said.

"Right?" Nixon asked.

"That's for sure," Rumsfeld said.

Fortunately for Rumsfeld, he escaped the fallout from Watergate when Nixon appointed him ambassador to NATO in 1972. In Brussels, he pushed for a stepped up US presence in Germany and for a new generation of mobile tactical nuclear weapons.

On defense issues Rumsfeld can't qualify as a moderate even by today's warped standards. He's always been a hawk. In 1975 Ford appointed Rumsfeld to replace James Schlesinger as secretary of defense. At 43, he was the youngest to hold the post. Now, at 68, he (along with George Marshall) will the oldest. Rumsfeld apparently didn't spend much time overseeing day-to-day matters at the Pentagon. Instead, according to an internal history of his tenure prepared by the Defense Department, he tried to politicize the offfice, hobnobbing with members of congress, playing to the press and "more than any of his predecessors, he served as a roving ambassador for the Defense Department".

Rumsfeld lamented the decline in defense spending that followed the Vietnam war, much of it under Ford's administration. He predicted (wrongly, of course) that it would generate "a fundamental instability in the world". As defense secretary, he lobbied hard for the very programs that would be the heart of the Reagan defense spending orgy five years later: the B-1 bomber, a fleet of new submarines and nuclear powered ships, the Trident missile and the MX intercontinental ballistic missile. By all accounts, Rumsfeld despised SALT II because it didn't leave the US with superiority. He tried to undermine it at every turn both inside and outside the administration.

At the Pentagon, Rumsfeld became known for his public relations stunts. As part of his campaign to sell the B-1 bomber, Rumsfeld, a former fighter pilot, got behind the controls and piloted one of the planes up the California coast while being filmed by a TV crew. "He thought he could jump from secretary of defense to the presidency," a longtime Pentagon analyst tells CounterPunch. "But even with the theatrics, Rummy was just too dull to excite anyone but the defense contractors."

Rumsfeld's ponderousness has given him the reputation of a sphinx, a brooding and secretive policy whiz. Rumsfeld seems to hold this opinion of himself and he published a book of labored and corny aphorisms on how to manage presidents, called Rumsfeld's Rules. It's as if Tom Lehrer tried to rewrite Macchiavelli. An example: "Avoid public spats. When a department argues with with government agencies in the press, it reduces the president's options."

There are some savage assessments of Rumsfeld. Here's how Nixon crony Pierre Rinfret described Rumsfeld: "What he contributed to the United States all the years he played in politics is beyond me. He is the perfect example of the absolutely perfect cover with very little inside. Or at least that is the way I knew him over the years. What

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substance he had is anybody's guess…But in all those years I never felt there was much there, and he held some of the highest positions of the land. That tells you a great deal about why and how the government is so fouled up. It doesn't attract the best and brightest, but mainly those who think they are and frequently aren't."

During the 1980s, Rumsfeld made his millions in the private sector, heading up two big corporations: pharmaceutical giant GD Searle and technology firm General Instruments. It was the era of downsizing and Rumsfeld was one of the most ruthless, slashing the workforces in both companies more than 30 percent. Searle's stock soared more than 500 percent and Rumsfeld earned Fortune magazine's praise as one of America's "toughest bosses".

Rumsfeld rarely plays the role of talking head. He's part of that dwindling group of politicos which still considers congressional testimony and presidential commissions to be a sign of political cachet. And over the past decade he's been on a lot of them. He was part of a group that actively opposed the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. He testified vehemently before congress against the Chemical Weapons Convention, opposing the ban because it would be bad for American businesses. "Most of us in business are engaged with joint ventures and partnerships with companies across the globe and we share proprietary information in the same facility", Rumsfeld testified. "And were these inspections to be imposed, it's entirely possible that not only your own proprietary information would be compromised, but so would the proprietary information of joint venture partners. I don't believe that the thousands of companies across this country know about this treaty in any detail, believe that the treaty would apply to them, understand that they could be subjected to inspections, or appreciate the unfunded mandates that would be imposed on them in the event this were to pass."

He has recently attacked the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with similar venom, terming it outmoded and destabilizing. In 1998, Rumseld was tapped to head a commission to evaluate the evolving missile threat to the United States and the need to accelerate funding for a ballistic missile defense system. Predictably, Rumsfeld's report on Star Wars reiterated the "rogue" nation rationale put forth by Gore, Madeleine Albright and other Clinton administration hawks. This gibberish was respectfully hailed in the press as bipartisan proof of "the emergence of a new window of vulnerability."

But Rumsfeld could scarcely be considered a dispassionate or neutral investigator on the matter. His disciple Frank Gaffney, a leading agitator for Star Wars, heads the Center for Security Policy. a group that lists Rumsfeld as one of its top contributors. Rumsfeld is also a member of Empower America, a group which ran a public relations and advertising campaign in favor of increased spending on Star Wars during the 1998 elections.

Of course the boondoggle known variously as "shield defense", "SDI", and other terms of art is permanently lodged in the defense budget, having first begun its predations on the national treasury back in the early 1960s. For Republicans in Congress it has a totemic presence beyond challenge or reason and even if he had private reservations, Rumsfeld would scarcely display them. But in fact he entertains no such doubts.

"Rummy's gone a little fruity over the past few years", a senate staffer on the Foreign Relations committee tells CounterPunch. "Some have taken to calling him the Star Child, after the demonic figure at the end of Kubrick's film 2001. First, he comes out full-bore for a new $60 billion edition of Star Wars, pointing the finger at the supposed missile threat from North Korea and Iran—two countries that can barely keep their traffic lights working. Now he's back obsessing on killer satellites, space lasers and using nukes against runaway asteroids. The question around here is: has he cleared all this spending with Greenspan?"

In fact a crisis does hang over the nation's military budget. Such much in the form of budgetary allocations are committed to grotesque follies like the F-22 fighter project that accusations of lack of readiness at the basic force level have substance. Rumsfeld is a perfect example of the corrupt politics that have engendered this state of affairs. CP

"What substance Rumsfeld had is anybody's guess…But in all those years I never felt there was much there."

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